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**REMARKS
BY
U.S. AMBASSADOR TO BANGLADESH DAN MOZENA
BANGLADESH DISASTER RESPONSE EXERCISE AND
EXCHANGE, 2014
OPENING CEREMONY
LAKESHORE HOTEL, DHAKA
AUGUST 18, 2014**

Major General Md. Siddiquir Rahman Sarker, Commander, Military Institute of Science & Technology

Mesbah ul Alam, Secretary, Bangladesh Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief

Brigadier General Sayeed Khan, Chief, Operation and Plans Directorate, Armed Forces Division

My colleagues from US Pacific Command in Hawaii who have contributed so much to preparations for DREE

... and you, all of you ... Bangladesh military, Bangladesh government civilians, civil society, international participants ... all of you who, like me, believe in preparedness for disasters, especially earthquakes

Asalaam 'malaikum and good morning

April 24, 2013 ...

It was a horrible day.

Rana Plaza collapsed, destroying 1136 lives, injuring hundreds more, tearing apart hundreds of families ... the wails of grief were heard around the world.

It was a horrible day ...

...but a day that carried instructive lessons for us.

Rana Plaza was a taste of what would happen when Dhaka is hit by a major earthquake.

According to one Government of Bangladesh estimate, if a 7.0 Richter scale earthquake strikes Dhaka, at least 70,000 of the city's 350,000 buildings will collapse.

The mind cannot even begin to fathom a disaster of this magnitude.

But fathom it we must ... we simply must think the unthinkable, imagine the unimaginable, prepare for the disaster of all disasters.

I applaud the Government of Bangladesh for its deep commitment to engaging on preparations for a large-scale earthquake. I am proud that America is Bangladesh's partner in making these preparations.

This morning we inaugurate the fifth annual Disaster Response Exercise and Exchange or DREE for short. This four-day exercise will focus heavily on communications ... communications among various ministries and agencies of the Bangladesh government; communications between government agencies and civil society; communications with the media and the citizens of the nation; communications with foreign governments and the international community as they seek to provide assistance for rescue and recovery.

Employing a combination of table-top exercises and field exercises, DREE will test and validate the plans that the government, civil society and other stakeholders have in place for responding to a mega-disaster. Most especially, DREE will assess the effectiveness of these plans in addressing the critical need for effective communications.

If past DREEs are a guide, one major lesson that likely will emerge is the importance of having a centralized command and control structure ... some kind of national disaster management center ... that will survive a calamitous earthquake and be available to support rapid and effective decision making. I urge the government to give urgent consideration to establishing such a disaster management center soonest. I am sure that America and Bangladesh's many other international friends would be helpful in this endeavor.

Of course, simply having a seismically safe command and control center is not in itself sufficient. The government needs to ensure that the right decision makers are available to populate the center and use it to orchestrate a fast and effective rescue effort followed by recovery efforts. The first step in this regard is to identify the key decision makers whose participation is critical in the wake of a disaster. Once these individuals are identified, then the government needs to ensure that they live and work in buildings that will survive an earthquake. These individuals will also need to have an earthquake-proof capacity to communicate with each other, recognizing that landlines and cell phones will all be out of commission. The individuals will need to be able to access the command and control center, possibly by foot, if the roads are blocked by collapsed buildings and downed power lines. This, of course, is a huge task, but one I am sure the government will give priority attention to.

Attention must also be given to the earthquake survivability of other vital elements of the response structure, for example, hospitals and other health facilities, fire departments, police and

other security centers, food and water supplies, etc. Bangladesh needs to address urgent questions such as whether these facilities would survive an earthquake, and, if not, how can they be retrofitted or replaced so they could survive an earthquake. These are tough, fundamental concerns that need to be addressed.

I believe that exercises such as this are instructive to the extent that they are realistic.

Last year I shared with DREE participants my experience at an earlier earthquake preparedness exercise, when I overheard participants in a table-top exercise on responding in the immediate aftermath of a huge earthquake talk about convening an inter-ministerial meeting at the secretary level to coordinate the response to the earthquake. I could bite my lip no longer. I interjected, reminding participants that in the aftermath of a real-life earthquake, communications would be destroyed with all landlines and cellphones dysfunctional, reminding them that some of the secretaries might be dead or injured or trapped or pre-occupied with saving family members or others, reminding them that there would be no functioning transportation available.

To be meaningful, this exercise must factor these unpleasant eventualities into the scenario. I know that this is less convenient; I know that this makes the exercise so much harder and gut-wrenching to think about, but this is the only way to ask the hard, hard questions that must be asked to come up with the answers that must be found to prepare for an earthquake. I hope you will bear these realities in mind as you undertake this exercise.

This exercise may be the most important thing any of us do this year. If you the participants in this intensive exercise ask the hard, hard questions and discuss freely, creatively and constructively how best to answer these questions, then I think all of Bangladesh, all of the wonderful people of this great nation, will be safer, better prepared for when the next earthquake hits Bangladesh.

For the sake of the great people of Bangladesh, I wish you well as you undertake this exercise. Your dedicated participation today could save countless lives tomorrow.

Thank you.

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**As prepared for delivery*